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*The US State department says it is deeply concerned about the fate of two American journalists who have been found guilty in North Korea of 'hostile acts' against the country. They were arrested in March by North Korean border guards. Chris Hogg reports.*

American diplomats say they are using **all possible channels** to release the two journalists, but the reality is it's not going to be easy. The United States and North Korea don't have **diplomatic relations**. Messages are passed using officials from third countries. The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il has wanted **direct talks** with the United States for years, and may use the two Americans, Euna Lee and Laura Ling as **'bargaining chips'** to try to **win concessions** from Washington.

Guards from the North arrested the pair while they were working near the country's border with China on March 17th. They have now been **convicted of hostile acts** against the country, and entering the North illegally. They face the prospect of being sent to one of the North's prison camps. The US State Department has described conditions in these institutions as **'harsh'** and **'life threatening'**.

Before the verdicts came in, the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton had described the charges against the two women as **'baseless'** and said they should be allowed to return home. She is thought to be exploring the possibility of sending **an envoy** to try to secure their release. There's been speculation in recent days that the former US vice president Al Gore might travel to Pyongyang. He's the co-founder of the media company the two women work for.

Chris Hogg, BBC News, Seoul

## Vocabulary and definitions

|                                  |  |
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| <b>all possible channels</b>     | every method they can think of to communicate  |
| <b>diplomatic relations</b>      | an arrangement between two countries where each has a representative in the other country      |
| <b>direct talks</b>              | an opportunity for 1-2-1 discussion without another person or party being there                |
| <b>bargaining chips</b>          | something which someone else wants that you are willing to lose in order to reach an agreement |
| <b>win concessions</b>           | gain special rights or favours   |
| <b>convicted of hostile acts</b> | found guilty of actions that might damage a country, its people or its buildings               |
| <b>harsh</b>                     | unnecessarily severe   |
| <b>life-threatening</b>          | could cause death  |
| <b>baseless</b>                  | not based on facts   |
| <b>an envoy</b>                  | someone who is sent as a representative from one government to another                         |

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/8088601.stm>

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/06/090608\\_witn\\_korea\\_page.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/06/090608_witn_korea_page.shtml)